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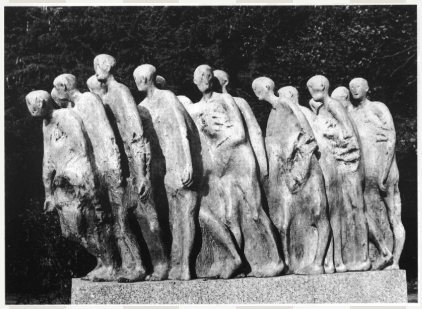
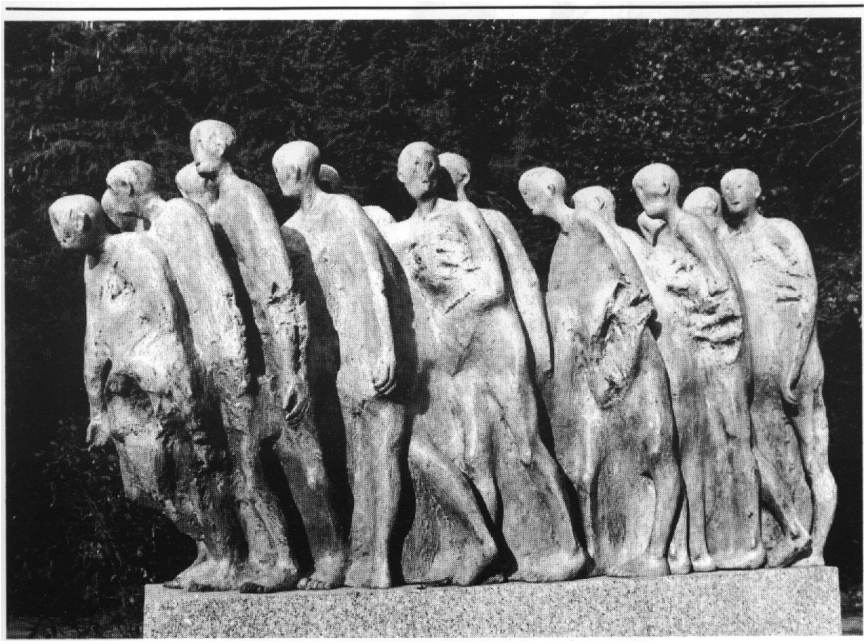
Recollections



The years 1938-1945

Sam Langer



Monument erected in Memory of
"The Death March"
to Dachau of April 1945

Bronze Sculpture by Hubertus von Pilgrim

MELBOURNE, DECEMBER 1999

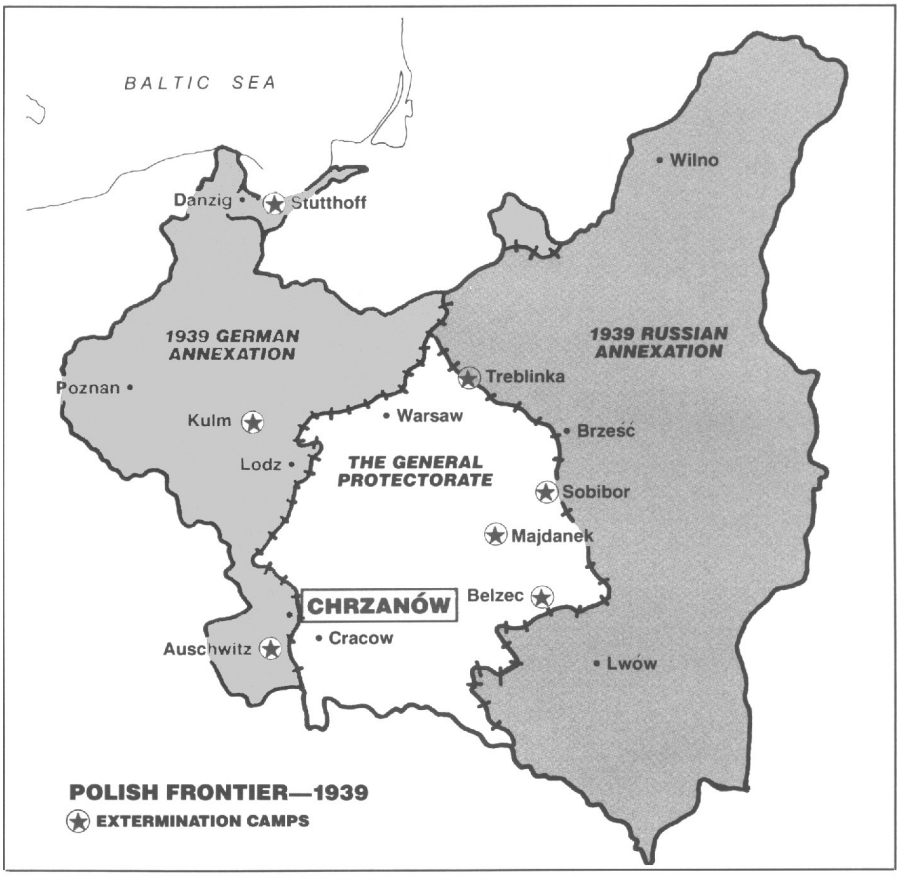
Many books have been written about the holocaust and the terrible suffering by the Jewish people.

I have no ambition to write or gain any kudos from this exercise of recording my ordeals. I just wish to leave a personal record of the tragedy for my family, my children and grandchild(ren), so that they can relate to it from a personal perspective and not only from history books and lessons.

The terrible loss suffered is difficult to describe in mere words. However, I hope in the process of recording these events I am able to convey some semblance of the magnitude of the decimation as it affected our family.

Hopefully the Jewish People and the world at large will never again experience anything as remotely horrific as this tragedy. However, it can only be avoided if the memory of the genocide is remembered and passed on to future generations.

S.L.


BALTIC SEA
Danzig •
Stutthoff
• Wilno
1939 GERMAN ANNEXATION
1939 RUSSIAN ANNEXATION
Poznan •
Treblinka
Kulm
• Warsaw
• Brześć
Lodz •
THE GENERAL PROTECTORATE
Sobibor
Majdanek
CHRZANÓW
Belzec
Auschwitz
• Cracow
• Lwów
POLISH FRONTIER—1939
EXTERMINATION CAMPS

As the year 2000 is approaching, I cast my memory back some 55 years, when as a seventeen year old, I was one of several thousand inmates of the concentration camp *Fuenfteichen* in Silesia, the part of Poland annexed by Germany in 1939. It was January 1945 and we were taken from this camp on a march to *Grossrosen* concentration camp (used as a transit camp). The temperature was at freezing point during daylight hours and well below at night, snow was ankle deep and we were dressed in just our striped camp uniforms and wooden clogs on our feet. Our lives were hanging on a thin thread, depending on the whims of the SS guards walking besides and behind the column of human misery. Anyone falling behind a few meters of the rear of the column was shot on sight and the bodies were left lying along the side of the road. Not even a simple burial was possible. Any would be good Samaritan trying to help a fallen comrade was destined for the bullet as well.

Photo taken secretly by a resident from the balcony of his home.

THE RUSSIAN ADVANCE

The Russian army was approaching from the east and gaining territory; we could hear artillery fire in the distance and as they were coming closer we were pushed even harder along the way. Only the relatively strong survived this ordeal. I was among the “lucky” ones who survived the march and arrived alive at *Grossrosen.* After a few days there, we were herded into open railway cattle trucks on a journey, which finished at *Hersbruck* in Germany, a sub-camp of the concentration camp *Flossenburg*.

THE BUNKERS

On arrival at *Hersbruck Camp* we faced a new horror; digging underground bunkers in solid rock and carrying boulders out from the tunnels by hand. Not even wheelbarrows were provided for the task; we had to carry rocks of various sizes after they were dislodged by explosions with back breaking consequences, constantly pushed by ever-watchful brutal guards. The slightest slowdown in pace resulted in severe beatings, which were a regular daily event.

Had anybody suggested at the time that I might possibly live to see the new millenium I would have regarded the proposition as insane and nothing short of a miracle. We were all barely alive, suffering from malnutrition, exposure and already in a state of exhaustion after suffering two years of slave labour and continuous hunger. Imminent death was looming and it is only due to many small “miracles”, the strength of the human spirit and sheer luck, that I happen to be one of the survivors of the Holocaust.

BEGINNING OF THE TRAGEDY

The tragic ordeal of our family started already in the year 1938. We were living in *Gablonz an der Neisse* (Jablonec nad Nisou in Czech) in northern Bohemia the so-called *Sudetenland*, This part of Czechoslovakia was handed to Hitler on a platter during Chamberlain's (British prime minister) exercise of appeasement in Munich in that year. It was thought that this offering would satisfy the ambitions of Hitler and prevent any further territorial demands or military actions. How naive was the world!

All Jews had to leave the area after annexation by Germany in September 1938 and we moved to Prague, where we found shelter with a Jewish lady by the name *Freundova* in *Praha XIII, Vrsovice, Bulharska Ulice 26*.

Having attended German school in *Gablonz*, my new studies created difficulties for me, as I had to switch to the unfamiliar Czech language for my further schooling. Without wishing to boast I excelled to the top of the class within one year.

PRAGUE 1939

Then came the German occupation of Czechoslovakia on the 15th March 1939 and by early 1940 Jewish students were no longer permitted to attend public schools. As Jewish teachers were also prohibited from practising, small groups were formed with 6-10 children, who gathered in a different private apartment daily to continue studies in a primitive fashion. It also kept us youngsters off the streets, which were already becoming dangerous for Jews, who were forced to wear the yellow Star of David as public identification. This was an invitation for hoodlums and hooligans to attack, especially vulnerable children, who could hardly offer resistance. .

On a trip to Munich a few years ago I spotted a book in a book store called Prague by Jiri Grusa depicting the history of Czechs, Germans and Jews in Prague. In it to my surprise was a photograph of a group of Jewish children with their teacher attending illegal school in the year 1941, myself included.

Extract from the book "Prague by Jiri Grusa"

MISSED OPPORTUNITY

A small quota of Jewish youngsters was allowed to leave for England on the so-called "*Kinder-Transport*". I registered and was accepted for early departure, however missed out on this opportunity to leave, as flights were suspended just one day prior to my scheduled flight to London. As all other opportunities to leave the country disappeared for us, my father decided to travel east to Russia by himself. He was hoping to find a place to settle and for mother and I to follow. Nobody realised the seriousness of the situation and we lived under the false illusion, that things would return to normal again soon. Although some rumours trickled through of killings of deportees, there was no mention of mass genocide at the time. Perhaps people did not believe or did not want to believe that humans could be capable of such atrocities.

FATHER'S DEPARTURE

This was the last time we saw my father and apart from correspondence whilst there was still a mail service, we did not have any contact with him. In 1942 he tried unsuccessfully to re-join us in *Chrzanow/Poland*, (how we arrived there I will explain later) only to be caught and transported to Auschwitz from where he never returned. We learned of his tragic death from eyewitnesses after the war who saw him at the *Auschwitz* extermination camp.

BAR-MITZVAH

In spite of all the problems at hand I managed to prepare for my Bar-mitzvah with the help of a Shaliach by the name of Zwi (his surname I don't remember) from Tel Aviv, who taught me the Parsha and Blessings in the absence of my father. The service took place in a lovely synagogue in *Praha/ Vyshehrad* followed by a spartan lunch with a few friends,

When visiting Prague in 1994 I wanted to show my family the synagogue, only to discover after several unsuccessful attempts to locate it, that a stray allied bomb destroyed it during the war.

PRAGUE & THE JOURNEY

Meanwhile in Prague the situation deteriorated further and we had to leave our residence together with our host and move into an area designated for Jews (a quasi Ghetto). Mother and I managed to get a very small room in an apartment crammed with other Jewish families in *Rumunska Ulice.* The deportation of Jews from Prague then started and transports to camps in Poland became frequent. Mother was in contact with our large family in *Chrzanow/Poland* and they managed to bribe a German officer who sent his wife in a Volkswagen

Beetle to Prague to find the two of us. We removed the compulsory Star of David from our clothes, being careful not to leave any trace of the outlines, which could give us away and endanger our “rescuer” and us.. The two women sat in front and I crouched in the back seat, trying to appear even smaller than I was. Not to create any undue suspicion we left all our belongings in Prague and without telling anyone of our departure traveled without any luggage with only the clothes we were wearing and a small bag.
We managed to cross the border between Czechoslovakia and Poland at Czesin without incident and arrived at Chrzanow the next day. All Jews of Chrzanow were already crammed into the Ghetto and we had to smuggle in under cover of darkness from the Aryan side where the officer and his family were accommodated. There we were welcomed with open arms by our relatives. Although conditions were already desperate, food was scarce and we had no identification, hence no food coupons. We shared and somehow managed to exist only to face new difficulties. Polish farmers from surrounding villages were bartering food for jewellery and other valuables at exorbitant prices and people were losing their jewellery and possessions quite fast, us included.

THE JEWELLERY

Before we left Prague mother divided what jewellery she had into two parcels; took one with her and left the other with a Czech friend *(Ludmila Rutarova)* for safekeeping. When my mother returned to Prague after the war in 1945 the lady returned the package untouched with all its contents intact. This did not occur in every instance, but this friend was an honest and true lady, who did not take advantage of the situation. There were many others who denied the existence of any possessions, not to speak of the thousands who did not return and their belongings remained with the “keepers”.

CHRZANOW GHETTO

Meanwhile in Chrzanow labour gangs had to be provided daily for road works and railway repairs and other menial tasks at which treatment was brutal and sadistic. The name of the German in charge of this operation was *Kleinecke*. Especially religious Jews with beards and payot received extra harsh treatment.
During this period many men were taken to slave labour camps on demand to replenish diminishing numbers due to illness and death as a result of brutal working conditions. Collections *(Razzias)* occurred mainly at night, when soldiers arrived in trucks and barged into homes and apartments to pick up the desired number of victims. Hiding places were improvised in attics and cellars, also behind secret walls for men to try and avoid capture. This practice proved mostly unsuccessful as their sniffer dogs easily detected hidden people.

In the meantime other measures were initiated to keep the population of the ghetto constantly in a state of fear and danger. Actions by the *"Kripo" Kriminalpolizei)* continued unabatedly with some of them shadowing individuals in order to detect minor misdemeanors and then handing out severe punishment.

THE HANGING

The pinnacle of atrocity occurred in May 1942, when seven Jews accused of "criminal" offences were hanged in a park in Krzyska Street.
An old baker by the name of Yisroel Gershtner and his two sons were thought to have baked bread when it was forbidden. A polish chimney sweep said he saw smoke rising from their chimney. Another Jew, Fayvl Weissberger was accused of possessing a small quantity of coffee, whereas Yehoshua Spangelet was found to have a few onions. Yisroel Frish, a merchant was accused of "cheating" a German. The

seventh “criminal” was found in possession of a piece of sausage. The entire jewish population of the *Chrzanow* Ghetto was ordered to witness the spectacle and a large number of people had their identification documents confiscated and only returned to them at the “Hanging Place”. The ordeal took more than two hours. The seven victims were shaven and their necks exposed for the noose. They could hardly stand up after beatings and torture suffered in the prison before hand. They all shouted “Shema Yisroel” before their deaths by hanging from seven old trees.

Eye witness snapshot of hanging

THE LIQUIDATION

Before dawn on Thursday the 18th of February 1943 the long anticipated and dreaded day arrived, when the town of Chrzanow was to be completely cleared of all the remaining 3000 Jews and declared "*Judenrein*". (clear of Jews). The Ghetto was surrounded and hermetically sealed and all Jews herded into the market place where the infamous "selection" took place in front of SS officers including the feared Major Lindner, who came especially for the occasion. He was eventually caught after the end of the war and brought before a British military court in Hamburg. His only remorse was that he killed too few Jews. One hour before his trial he committed suicide by hanging himself in his prison cell.

After most of the remaining Jews were assembled in the market place, the *SS officers* and *Gestapo* decided the fate of each individual by inspecting and directing every one in quick succession to the left or to the right of the table placed in the centre of the square. On one side were old people, children separated from parents and any person appearing weak or with visible disabilities. It was obvious, that this group was hardly useful for any practical work. It was thought at first, that this group was to remain in town, while the other was destined for work in slave labour camps. In fact some people sneaked out of the group destined for labour camps across to the second group, which, as was later discovered, was sent directly to the *Auschwitz* extermination camp. Mothers, who tried to re-join their children were beaten and pushed back to their group. The second group consisted of able-bodied men and women who were destined for labour camps.

When it was my turn , the SS officer thrust the question at me: *"Wie alt bist du?"* (How old are you?) and my reply without hesitation was *"Siebzehn"* (Seventeen), although I was only fourteen at the time. This was one of the many incidents (or small miracles), which saved me from certain death as I was sent to join the group of the work force instead

of the one which was shipped to *Auschwitz*. My mother was also in this group, however we were separated and she was sent to a different camp. This was the last time I saw her until we met again after the war. We had no communication and did not know whether the other was alive. The first news I received was at *Grossrosen* in January 1945 when inmates of many surrounding camps in the area were brought together into this transit camp for transportation to Germany. I then learned that my mother with a friend escaped from the camp *Blechhammer*, where she spent the time since our separation. At the beginning of the march to *Grossrosen* from their camp both of them escaped and were hoping to reach the Russian troops, which were approaching from the east. Nobody knew whether they were successful and so it was good news and bad news at the same time. The good news knowing she had survived till then and the bad, thinking they may have been shot whilst escaping, as this was the fate of many who attempted it.

THE CAMPS

After the selection at the Chrzanow market square our group was transported to the *Markstaedt* camp, a so-called *"Zwangsarbeitslager"* (Forced labour camp), which were slave labour camps prior to the establishment of the infamous Concentration Camps. I arrived there together with one of my uncles, my mothers' brother Chaskel Reich, who was also separated from his family (wife and young daughter). My other relatives, who were part of the work group were dispersed and finished up in different camps. My grandmother, Malka Reich (Mother's mother) together with the many young relatives and the very old ones were sent directly to *Auschwitz,* where they met their terrible death at the gas chambers.

Gathered in a large square in the centre of the camp used for assembly *("Apellplatz")* we were divided into two groups, one to remain at this camp and the other group to be sent on to *Blechhammer.* My uncle was selected for this group. We

wanted to remain together and he asked the Jewish camp leader, so-called *"Judenaelteste"* to let me join his group. This he flatly refused, but said that if we wished to remain together, my uncle could stay with me at the *Markstaedt* camp. He declined the offer, as I believe he thought that he might be somehow reunited with his family and therefore decided not to stay. This was the last time I saw him; he, his wife and young daughter did not survive. At the end of this short episode the camp leader asked me to come and see him next morning. I was rather apprehensive, as I had no idea what his intentions were. Somehow the incident with my uncle awakened a spark of morality in him and he gave me an additional meal ticket valid for that month. I was thus able to obtain an extra soup ration from the kitchen for the first month of my camp internment.

On confronting him at the beginning of the next month and hoping for a repeat, the extent of his generosity had expired and I lost the initial benefit, which has helped me getting through the first month a little less hungry.

THE RIGHTEOUS CZECH

The next "miracle" occurred when I met a Czech prisoner of war from Prague at the munition factory, where we worked together with an array of different people. There were prisoners of war from Poland, Russia, Czechoslovakia and the inmates from our labour camp. He took pity of my predicament and devised a method of helping me from time to time with some extra food. He could not give me anything during working hours as we were under constant supervision and if detected both of us would have been severely punished. Even if it would have been possible to pass something to me during the day, we were very closely watched on return to the camp and if suspicious, subjected to thorough body searches. If someone was found carrying anything irregular, the punishment was usually, apart from a

beating, loss of rations for a period, not just for the offender, but all the occupants of his barrack.
The camp of the Czech prisoners where he was held, was close to ours and we arranged a time after dark when he would walk close to the fence and watch for the guard walking past on patrol. The Czech prisoners of war still had freedom of movement and their camp was not surrounded by barbwire

as ours was. On approaching the fence under cover of darkness he whistled a Czech song *"Nad tym prazskim moste rozmarynka roste, nikdo i tam nezaleva, ona sama roste"* (loosely translated: A flower grows under the Prague bridge, nobody attends to her, she grows all by herself) as a sign of his presence. Hearing the tune I emerged from the shadow of the barracks and replied in kind whistling the same melody. He would then throw a small package over the 3-metre barbwire fence in my direction. I grabbed the package and rushed back to the barrack and onto my bunk, hoping neither guards nor hungry fellow prisoners had noticed the incident. The time span for this exercise was approximately 3 minutes, when the guard returned to the same spot again on his patrol around the allocated portion of the fence perimeter.

The package usually contained some bread and fruit and sometimes even a piece of chocolate (a special treat). The Czech prisoners were still allowed to receive food parcels from home and this man was kind enough to pass a little on to me. It did not amount to much, but any little extra helped to supplement the small rations we were getting. It also provided a small psychological boost, by not feeling completely abandoned. After all, I was only 15 years old at the time and all alone, separated from my mother, family and friends.

THE CONCENTRATION CAMP

Whilst we were in the *Markstaedt* labour camp we could see a new large camp being built in the distance with high, double barbwire fences surrounding it. The outside electrified and observation towers erected with powerful lights illuminating the vacant area between the two fences at night. On completion a transport arrived and it was filled with thousands of people, all clad in the infamous striped uniforms of the concentration camps. At that stage we were still in civilian outfits and we pitied the people who had to suffer the atrocities of the concentration camp. As everyone worked in the grounds of the huge munition factory we discovered, that most of the inmates were Jews and some political prisoners of various nations, as well as criminals, homosexuals and gypsies. Within a few weeks our camp was disbanded and we were all transferred to this notorious new Concentration camp called *"Fuenfteichen".* Our civilian clothes were taken and we became part of the *"Pajama Brigade"* as well.

Typical bunks of a concentration camp.

On my first day at the munition factory I was assigned to a group carrying out building works. The first task was to unload a railway truck full with bags of cement. When it was my turn a 50 kg bag was thrust on my shoulders and I promptly collapsed under the unfamiliar weight. Somehow the guards did not notice my predicament and I managed to assume the job of gathering loose cement from broken bags off the floor and into containers. Our next task was replacing railway sleepers and tracks and laying new tracks for trains to enter right into the centre of the factory for the purpose of unloading raw materials and loading finished products for shipment. This job was extremely hard and strenuous as well as subject to many accidents and beatings by bloodthirsty guards.

The daily routine continued with frequent interruptions to the monotony as a result of various incidents. On one occasion a fellow inmate hid in the grounds of the factory, hoping to escape during the night. His absence was discovered on return the camp and we were all kept standing in the assembly area while a search was mounted. It did not take

THE ESCAPE

very long before he was found and recaptured. He was brought back to the camp badly beaten and put on display tied to a pole. All inmates were forced to file past him to see what happens to anyone trying to escape. He was left tied to the pole in agony and without food or water and eventually died, succumbing to his injuries from the severe beatings he received after capture.

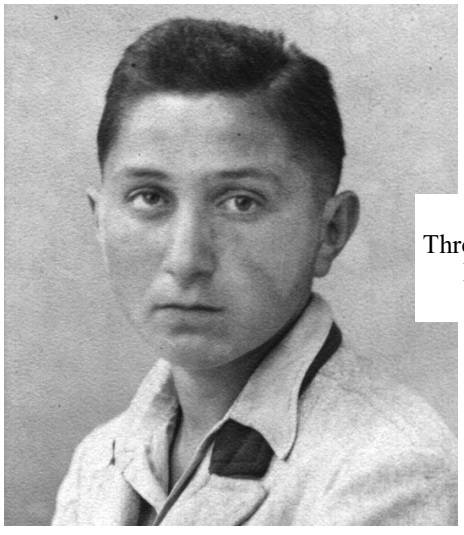
THE BREAK

My physical condition deteriorated fast from fatigue and lack of nourishment.

Always on the lookout for some alleviation from the harsh conditions I noticed one day the German foreman looking for a directional sign and failing to find one, trying to improvise. I approached and told him, that I was good at calligraphy and suggested giving me the opportunity to paint the sign for him.

He agreed and was quite impressed with the finished product. As a result, I managed to get the job of painting signs. It lasted for a few weeks and I was painting all sorts of safety and directional signs, as well as assembling and erecting these on the factory premises. This was quite a relief while it lasted, as it was light work and I was not subjected to ill treatment by the brutal guards during this time. However, when it became evident, that the site was saturated with signage I had to go back to hard labour and was only called to paint a new sign on odd occasions, when one was really needed.

Another incident occurred when a second inmate escaped, who managed to get away without being recaptured, despite a prolonged search period, during which all inmates suffered abuse and beatings in the assembly area. He was one of the appointed group leaders and evidently established some outside connections, which helped him escape. We heard no more about his fate, but as a consequence suffered another indignity. Our heads were already shorn, devoid of any hair, but now, in addition a strip of approximately 50 mm was shaved from the forehead over the scalp to the back of the neck. In case of an attempted escape this would result in immediate recognition and capture. A barber (one of the inmates) did it in each barrack with a razor, which became blunt quickly and needless to say, was not disinfected or sharpened between shaves. As a consequence I contracted an infection resulting in the development of abscesses on the back of my neck and a rash all over my face. I still have a number of hard knots on the back of my neck to this day as a constant reminder of this incident. A photograph taken several months after liberation still shows the traces of the rash on my face.



June 1945
Three months after
Liberation

Conditions were deteriorating fast, rations became smaller and people were dying from exhaustion and malnutrition. Those suffering from injuries or illness and admitted to the medical barracks seldom returned. The slightest doubt of a full recovery to work resulted in deportation by train to (as we later discovered) the extermination camp at Auschwitz. The appetite of the masters of the gas chambers and crematoria was inexhaustible. I discovered the presence of a cousin (Leibek Feniger) who had been admitted to the sick ward. When I tried to visit him there I was told that he had already been transferred to “another” camp. …… and he was never heard of again.

SINAI ORGANIZATION—1938

Leibek Feniger top row 4th from left.

FOOD RATIONS

Each barrack had a leader called *"Stubenaeltester"* who had a somewhat privileged position acting as henchman for the SS guards and handing out punishment on their behalf for the slightest misdemeanor. All sorts of unnecessary tasks were invented, for instance scrubbing a perfectly clean floor over and over or some other useless task. He had the benefit of a single bed directly opposite the entrance door some distance away from the three layer bunks of the rest of the occupants. As he was the recipient of the rations, he made sure of getting a decent portion and due to his position was beyond reproach from the other inmates. Food rations were distributed in bulk for each barrack and had to be divided up between the occupants. To avoid disputes over size of ration a crude weighing device was improvised similar to gold scales to ensure that each portion was equal and no one received more than his due. Frequent fights broke out none the less, when someone felt he was short changed and believed he received a few grams of bread less than his share.

From time to time we received a small quantity of tobacco of sorts, called *"Machorca"* which resembled tree roots, rather than tobacco and could only be rolled into thick paper for smoking. I promptly exchanged my portion for a small piece of bread with one of the many smokers, who were so addicted, that they traded some of their meager bread rations for a smoke. After liberation I took up smoking, as a consequence of earlier depravation, rather than real craving. It developed into a habit of smoking at least a packet a day of strong American brands, like "Camel" and "North State" and lasted approximately ten years. During a heavy cold I lost the desire to smoke and gave it up completely ever since.

THE PROPOSITION

One of the “barrack-elders”, a Pole, was in charge of the barrack adjoining mine. He made several advances asking me to come to his quarters at night with promises of extra food as a reward. I resisted the temptation for a long time, but when rations became ever smaller and constant hunger persisted I decided to take up his offer. In the middle of night under cover of darkness I sneaked across the short distance to the adjoining barrack and quietly entered his quarters. As he became aroused and attempted to undress me and pull down my pants, I suddenly panicked, jumped of the bed and ran out of the barrack stricken with fear. Rushing out the door and down the few steps leading to the path I fell right into the low barbwire fence surrounding a small patch of grass in front of the entrance. Bleeding profusely I ran to the toilet block and tried to stem the flow of blood with cold water. The scars left from the points of the barbwire are clearly visible on my upper right leg and remind me of this incident every time I have a shower. I was afraid of repercussions as the fellow had a reputation for aggressive behavior, but luckily nothing eventuated. Maybe he was embarrassed and I kept well out of his way in future.

On one occasion we were taken to a nearby railway station to unload truckloads of potatoes. Afraid of severe punishment nobody dared to take any back to the camp lest being detected on return. So the only option was to eat some potatoes raw whilst unloading the railway truck. We had to eat the peels as well, for fear being detected if we had discarded the peels. The result was a lot of gastroenteritis and diarrhoea as a consequence. We also encountered an air attack by allied planes strafing the railway station during the time we were unloading. Although in danger of being hit by bombs or machine gun fire, we quietly rejoiced about the fact the planes were able to penetrate so deep into German territory and there just might be a glimpse of hope for an end to the war and our suffering.

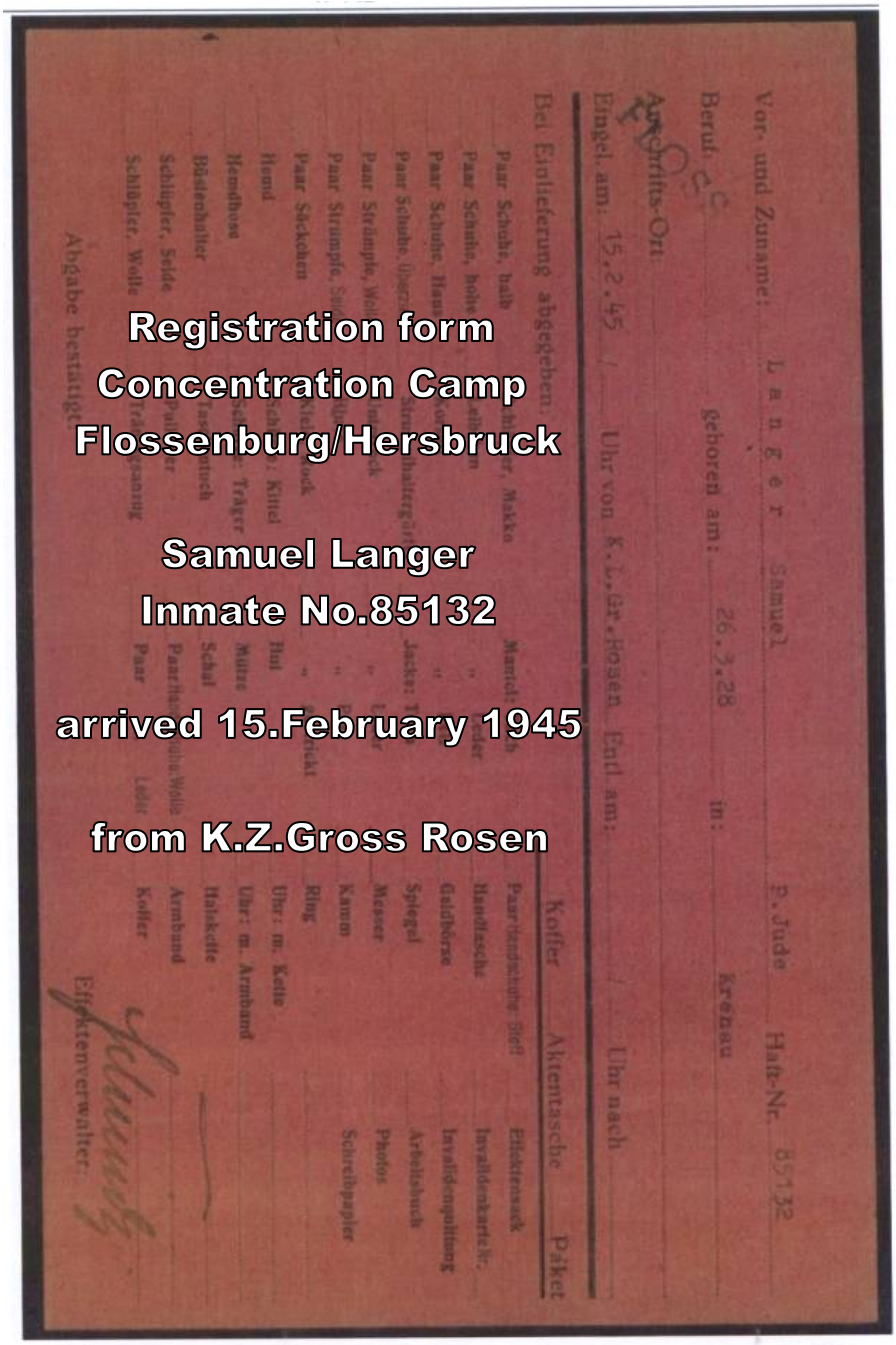
THE CATTLE TRUCKS

But then came the march from *Fuenfteichen* concentration camp to *Grossrosen,* which I already mentioned earlier and the subsequent transport in the cattle trucks to *Hersbruck/ Germany*, which was another life and death ordeal. The journey took several days with frequent stops on sidetracks to allow German troop and supply trains to pass on the way to the eastern front and others returning with injured soldiers. We were not allowed off the train except on those occasions when it stopped in the middle of fields in an uninhibited area. At all other times bodily functions had to be performed in the truck with the result of unbearable conditions and terrible stench. There was even a body of a man who died on the journey in our truck, which could not be disposed off. Only the cold weather prevented a serious outbreak of disease. On the other hand the cold caused a lot of frostbites due to the lack of warm clothing and I have a large dark patch on my left thigh as a permanent “souvenir” of this experience.

We spent three long months at *Hersbruck* from February 15th till April 1945. The conditions there were the worst of all the camps I encountered in the past two years and had it lasted much longer I doubt whether I could have survived. We were all physically and mentally exhausted and constantly hungry as food rations were getting progressively smaller.

DEATH MARCH NO.2

Then one rainy, windy day in early April 1945 after morning roll call we were marched out of the camp. Instead of going to the work site we were taken in the direction of the town of *Hersbruck.* Rumours were spreading that the camp was being liquidated and we were on the way to *Dachau,* the infamous concentration camp near Munich. We were walking through the centre of town with the inhabitants staring at the column of half dead creatures from windows and doorways being


Registration form
Concentration Camp
Flossenburg/Hersbruck
Samuel Langer
Inmate No.85132
arrived 15.February 1945
from K.Z.Gross Rosen

spurred on by heavily armed SS guards with dogs. Some of the towns people tried to hand food to the hungry, but were forced back by the guards and only very few managed to get anything.

Photo of an other group taken by a resident.

Suddenly my digestive system revolted and I suffered a bout of diarrhoea. I was unable to stop and afraid to move out of the column for fear of being shot, having witnessed many shootings during such incidents before. It was bad enough anytime, but this added problem made the walk that day twice as hard. It was dark by the time we were put into a hay shed along the way for the night when I was able to clean myself a little.

I learned later that other groups were forced to walk by night and hide in forests during the day to avoid being seen by the population. Our guards seemed to be oblivious and did not care if we were seen trudging along in daylight. This went on for several days without any food rations. We were given a little extra on the morning we left the camp, but being extremely hungry it was devoured very quickly and nobody

had any left by the end of the first day. Sometimes we found potatoes or vegetables stored in our night shelters. We could only eat these raw, as there was no possibility of cooking and anyway would have attracted immediate attention and punishment.

Mark Baker in his book "*The Fiftieth Gate"* recalls his father's memories of a similar ordeal*: "We didn't know where we were going but we knew we had to walk. Walk, walk, walk, wearing wooden shoes, and anyone who couldn't walk fast was shot. It was winter, very cold, snow, and we just kept on walking because we knew if we stopped, it would be the end. Until the trains arrived: 'On to the trains,' they shouted, and we ran on, but some didn't make it and were left in the snow or shot by German guards. There was no roof and we were frozen. I remember passing a station and people threw potatoes at us. I tried to grab one, but a German hit me on the head with a gun. More shooting and my head was spinning. I didn't know where I was. The Germans threw bread into our wagons and people jumped on it like hungry animals, one on top of the other. People killed each other for a bit of food. The man on the bottom of the pile sometimes suffocated…"*

The night of the 19th April 1945, after walking a distance of some 146 km from *Hersbruck*, we spent in a farm shed where a quantity of pumpkins was stored. We again ate some raw before trying to get some rest and sleep. At daylight it seemed unusually quiet, as normally we were chased out at the first sign of light and forced to march on. As we ventured out, there was no sign of our guards or any other human being for that matter. The guards usually stayed at farmers' homes over night. We went back inside the shed and every one of us picked up a few pumpkins and started walking along the road towards the nearest village, which turned out to be *Allershausen.* We soon discarded the pumpkins we were carrying, as the weight was too much for our weak bodies to carry and our stomachs were already filled with raw pumpkin anyway. (To this day I detest the sight of pumpkin

and have not eaten any since.)

LIBERATION

There was no sign of any guards, who all seemed to have vanished into thin air. After a couple of hours wandering aimlessly along the road we heard the rumbling of vehicles in the distance. Not knowing their identity we tried to hide in bushes on the side of the road. When they came closer we could see a tank and a few armored vehicles emblazoned with the allied five-point star. We came out onto the road and rushed towards them in a frenzy of excitement hugging the soldiers with the last bit of strength left. It turned out to be a small patrol of American infantry on their way south towards Munich. It seemed like a dream, we were too weak, physically and mentally, to really appreciate the fact that the war was actually coming to an end and we were still alive and now free. After a short discussion the soldiers gave us whatever food they had on board and continued on their way. There were still remnants of German soldiers putting up some resistance and gangs of SS guards (including ours) hiding in the forest, trying to avoid capture.

When we reached the village *(Allershausen*), still overcome by emotion and fatigue we went in small groups into farmhouses and remained there for a few days until we regained a little strength. The farmers gave us food and shelter and some civilian clothes until we were able to continue on our way. According to the radio the Americans were making good progress, gaining control of more territory and liberating concentration camps along the way.

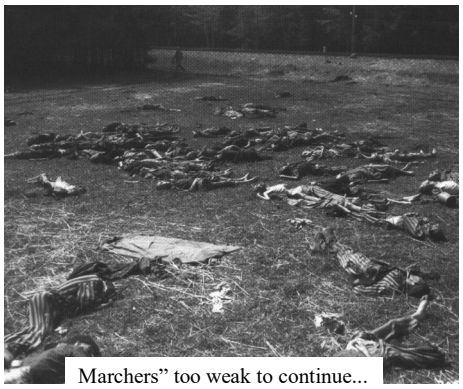
I formed a very close friendship in the camp with two other inmates, Aron Helesiewicz and Wolf Gluckstein. We were helping each other as good as we could, watching each others rations when one had to go to the toilet or with any other problems. However moral support was our main sustenance; we talked about home and family and fantasized

ON THE DAY OF LIBERATION IN DACHAU

L. to R., Shlamek Berkowitz, Abraham Weinberg, David Klapholz
Unfortunately A. Weinberg died one day after from overeating *(picture taken by U.S. Army)*

Victims of camp Kaufering found by U.S.Army

Corpses of victims in cattle truck.



Marchers" too weak to continue...

about our possible survival. We remained together until we reached Munich, when each went his own way in different directions in search of any surviving relatives.

It was then that I learned of my mother's successful escape and survival, but no one could tell me her whereabouts, other than she was somewhere in Poland. I thought she could be heading for *Chrzanow,* the place where we were separated and I made my way by train from Munich via Prague to Poland. Train services were disjointed and I had to change trains many times. I kept asking traveling camp survivors if anyone had seen my mother. I had a small photograph of her, which I guarded right through my internment. It was the only possession I managed to hold on to and gave me a small moral boost by looking at it any time I felt miserable.

I showed the photo to all and sundry. On one such occasion after crossing the border into Poland I met some people on the platform who knew my mother and had seen her several days before. They told me, that she was heading towards *Gablonz* in Czechoslovakia, our prewar domicile. On hearing this I immediately reversed direction and headed back to Prague. From there I managed to telephone a pre-war friend of my parents, (non-Jewish) in *Gablonz.* He had in fact already met with my mother and within the hour he managed to locate her and she phoned me in Prague.

RE-UNION

This was the happiest moment of my life. I rushed to the station to catch the next available train to *Gablonz* and there we were eventually reunited, happy to be alive and together again, however devastated having tragically lost my father and most of our large family who perished during this horrible

period.

FAMILY LOST

My mother was the youngest of 8 children, who were all married and had children and even grandchildren of their own.

Her eldest brother Leibche who was 21 years older than my mother lived with his wife (nee Wolf) and large family in *Bochnia/Poland.* They had 5 children: Miriam, Ruchka, Melech, Balcia (married Langer) and Baruch Mendel who was married to Sala Markowitz. They had 3 children, Shmilek, Sheindel and Melech. Not a single person from this large family survived; they all perished in camps and gas chambers.

Brother Tobias was 19 years older than my mother and lived with his wife and 5 children in *Metz/France*. He was transported to *Auschwitz* with his son Salomon in June 1942 from *Drancy* in France on transport No.5. His wife Ryfka, son Eliezer and daughter Reizla were taken on transport 66 to *Auschwitz* in January 1944. They all perished in the gas chambers. Only two daughters survived; Anna in *Paris* and Erna in *Saarbrucken.*

Sister Hinda married to Moses Feniger had a shoe store in *Chrzanow*. Their two sons were taken to labour camps in 1942. Salomon survived but Leibek died in camp *Markstadt*. Hinda and husband together with two daughters, Hanka and Ruzia were taken to *Auschwitz* from *Chrzanow* in January 1943 where they perished.

Sister Pesla with husband (Ederson) lived in *Chrzanow* and both with daughter Sala were also taken to *Auschwitz* in January 1943. Son Harry survived and emigrated to U.S.A. with wife Susan in 1946.

Brother Isaac David with wife Reizla and two daughters lived in *Chrzanow.* All of them also met their death in *Auschwitz* gas chambers in January 1943.

Brother Chaskel with wife Doba and daughter Krysia were dispersed in January 1943 to various camps from *Chrzanow* and did not survive. My grandmother, Malka Reich (my mother's mother) who lived with them, was in her eighties and was sent straight to *Auschwitz* extermination camp where she perished in the gas chambers.

Sister Cypora Dyncia with husband Mendel Klapholz lived in *Ciecin/Czechoslovakia* with 2 children, son Leibek and daughter Judith. They also perished.

Apart from our immediate family there were many close relations and their descendants of my grandparents Reich and Cisner living in *Chrzanow.* I have not been able to locate any survivors, although I investigated thoroughly all over the world.

My father's family was also affected in a similar way with disastrous consequences as well.

Grandfather Berek Langer with my grandmother had a bakery in *Chrzanow, Krakowska ul.*

They had six children, Jacob with his wife Rachel Laja nee Mandelbaum and 2 children, son Berek and daughter Regina. The only survivor is cousin Regina who lives in Israel with her husband Yacov Rosenzweig and two daughters.

Daughter Mala survived but lost her husband Lipski from *Krakow,* where they lived before the war. Their son Bernard survived and now lives in Canada with his wife and 3 children. Mala remarried in Canada Sam Lowi and their daughter Miriam now lives in Toronto with her husband Franklin Young and family.

Son Chaskel survived in Belgium; he lost his wife and remarried after the war and moved to Canada, where his son Eric and daughter Patti with husband Charles Dray and daughters Ariane and Ilana now live.

Son Joseph died in his infancy in 1898.

Son David Samuel, a bachelor perished as well in 1943.

The sixth child was my father Simon who perished in *Auschwitz* as described earlier. And to my knowledge there are no other survivors from the Langer branch of the family in *Chrzanow*.

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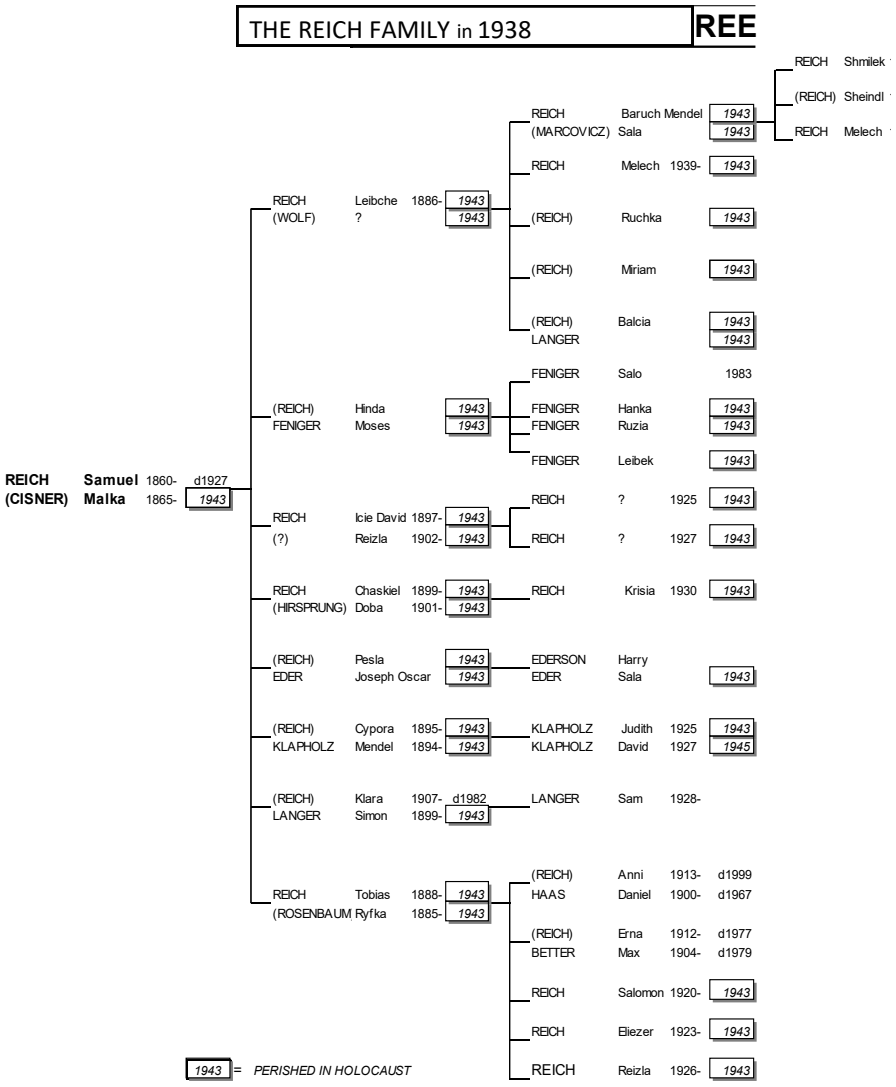


IN **1938** THE REICH FAMILY & SPOUSES NUMBERED **46**

IN **1945** THE SURVIVORS NUMBERED ONLY **8**

DURING THE HOLOCAUST 38 FAMILY MEMBERS PERISHED!

Moses Feniger

Hinda Feniger nee Reich

Tobias Reich 1941

Simon & Klara Langer / Chaskel & Doba Reich 1928

Grandmother Malka, Doba & Chaskel 1935

Icie David Reich

Tobias Reich with Family in Metz 1941

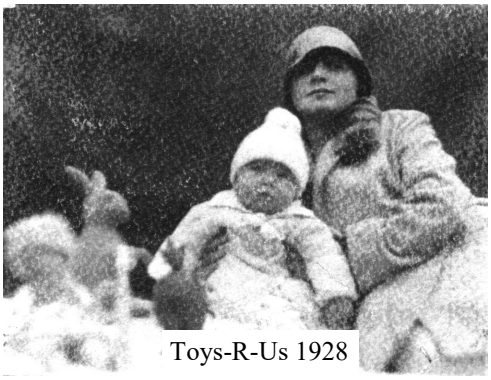
Sala Eder and Marimka Cisner 2nd Cousin

Klara & Simon Wedding 1927

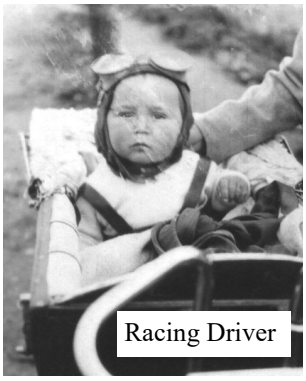
Father & Son 1928

Mother & Son

Family Outing Gablonz 1928



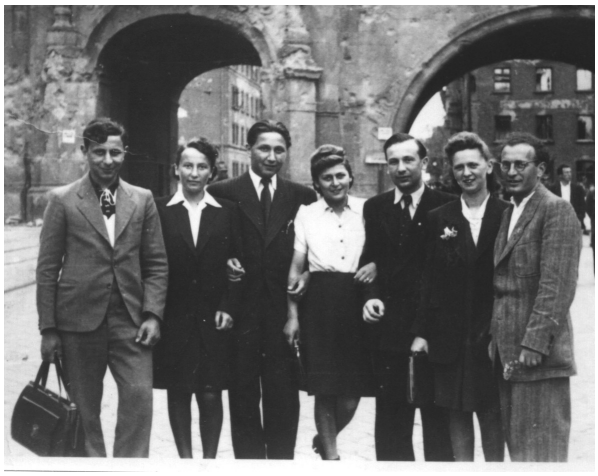
Toys-R-Us 1928



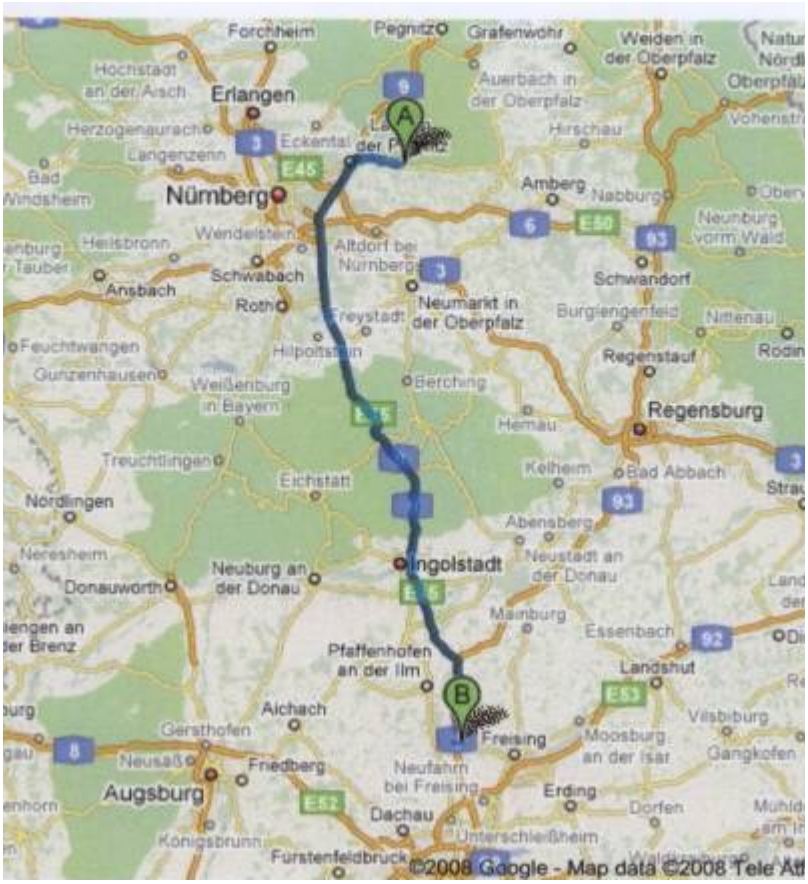
Racing Driver

Photo of my mother, which I managed to hold on to right through the years of my ordeal. It helped at particularly bleak moments of distress not to give in and give up the desire for survival..

Happier Times
Mother & Son in 1947



Cousins & friends in Munich 1946
Harry Ederson 1st on left, Sam Langer 3rd from left,
Sol Feniger 3rd from right. Chajka & Srulek Berkowitz 2nd & 1st from right.



Death March No.2
from Concentration Camp Hersbruck to Dachau

Liberated by American troops
on the road near Allershausen on the 20th April 1945